



40 WORTH STREET, SUITE 605
NEW YORK, NY 10013
MAIN NUMBER: (212) 691-0950
FAX NUMBER: (212) 691-0951

89-14 PARSONS BLVD, 2ND FLOOR
JAMAICA, NY 11432
MAIN NUMBER: (212) 691-0950
FAX NUMBER: (718) 658-5630

COURTHOUSE NUMBER: (212) 233-8900
FAX @ COURTHOUSE: (212) 233-8922

Cornerstone Advocacy for the Solo Practitioner

Rebecca Horwitz, Senior Staff Attorney, CFR

SERVICES

CHANGING THE WAY OF THINKING

Think critically before agreeing to a service plan and make common sense arguments.

- **WHY?** Are multiple services being offered to this parent for the sake of offering formulaic services or are these services that will assist the parents in reunifying with their children? Are they duplicative and unnecessary services?
- **WHAT?** Are they appropriate services for this family given their specific issues? For example, what type of parenting skills program is the parent being asked to complete: is it a class that will address the age of the children at issue or do these children have specific special needs?
- **WHERE?** Are the service referrals in locations that are easily accessible for the client? Can one service provider engage the parent in multiple services? Is there a service provider that has particular cultural competence or language offerings that would benefit a specific family? Are there particular providers that have late evening or weekend hours to accommodate a parent's employment schedule? Are there particular providers that provide low cost, sliding scale, or free programs?
- **WHEN?** Have all barriers to services been addressed, i.e. Medicaid coverage, public assistance, or transportation costs? Is there something that should take place before a specific service begins, i.e. suggest a client attend an assessment for a drug or alcohol treatment program to see if a formal program is needed or if random testing would be sufficient?
- **HOW?** Who is making the service referral? How will the parent be notified of the referral? Will the parent be notified in their native language? Was an appointment scheduled for the parent or does the parent have to schedule the appointment themselves? Does the parent have to be accompanied in order to begin the service? If necessary, have child care arrangements been made so the parent can attend services? Are there regulations or statutes that would require the local social services agency to help cover the cost of services?

PRIORITIZING COMMUNICATION

WITH THE CLIENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When you first meet the client, discuss their schedule and income, including whether they have insurance. Find out what neighborhood they live in and work in and their method of transportation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss any service recommendations with the client and explain how that service would positively impact the family and/or the court proceedings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask the client if there are any services they wish to engage in or feel they could benefit from. This helps them feel in control and more likely to continue with and complete the services.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If the client has been engaged in services in the past, what did they benefit from and why? If services were unsuccessful previously, ask why.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stay in contact with the client in between court dates to keep updated on their progress in services. Ask the client to keep you updated if any services are completed, discontinued or changed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask the client who is providing specific services- find out their name, phone number, email, and fax number.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anytime a parent enrolls in a new service, ask them to sign a release so you can help monitor their services.

WITH THE SERVICE PROVIDER
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce yourself to the service provider via telephone or email early on in the court process. This will help establish a relationship and make it easier to request information at a later date.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schedule reminders for yourself to reach out to service providers in advance of court dates in order to have current information
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When requesting information from service providers, explain the purpose for the information at that time, i.e. are you making a visiting application or asking for the children to return to the parent's care?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make sure to explain the allegations (i.e. send them the petition) and the procedural posture of the case when discussing with providers (with the client's permission!). This will allow them to provide more informed reports which will allow the court to grant them more weight.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When attempting to get information about a parent's compliance and progress in services, phone conversations are generally the most productive, but ask for a follow up letter or report to be provided to give to the court.
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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you are having trouble reaching a service provider, let the client know and ask them if they can bring documentation about services to court appearances. Let the client know what issues would be helpful to address in the report, this is an easy way to help empower the parent. Give the parent a letter directed to the service provider about the information you will need for court.

WITH OTHER COUNSEL
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Find out what are the main issues other counsel wishes to see addressed. Does the attorney for the child think family therapy is necessary? Does the agency attorney think anger management is the issue?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If at all possible, provide any updates about services to other counsel in advance as it may help negotiate

settling contested issues.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Find out what are the main issues other counsel wishes to see addressed. Does the attorney for the child think family therapy is necessary? Does the agency attorney think anger management is the issue? Whenever possible stagger the services if the client does not feel ready to engage in all of them right away.

LITIGATION

- Often times, parents will engage in services prior to them being mandated by court. However, when the time comes that they are incorporated into orders, think critically about whether we would support such orders. These could include when services are mandated as conditions of paroles, part of disposition, or in the course of permanency hearing determinations. Once a service is court mandated, it becomes difficult to argue that it is not appropriate. By allowing services that are inappropriate, unnecessary or not feasible to be mandated, we are putting our clients in a position where they will likely fail. Litigating the necessity of including specific services as part of orders makes it more likely that our clients will succeed in completing such services.
- Even if the litigated issue is not one involving services, include service information and compliance in the application. Are you requesting more liberalized visits or for a child to return home? Show progress in services as a way of supporting that application.